(xii) Madhya Pradesh State Co-operative Oil Seeds Growers Federation Ltd.,

(xiii) TheAndhra Pradesh Marketing Federation (AP MARKFED)

(c) and (d) Government of India keeps a watch on prices and availability of onions to the domestic consumers through an Inter Ministerial Review Committee and Minimum Export Price (MEP) of onion is fixed on a monthly basis. Exports being dependent on a host of factors, including external factors, the Minimum Export Price as well as the revenue expected during the next two year as such cannot be estimated.

Turmeric patents

1759. DR. (SHRIMATI) NAJMAA. HEPTULLA: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware that one hundred twenty-one turmeric related patents have been granted in the USA so far;

(b) if so, whether Government have filed any objections in this regard; and

(c) if not, how Government propose to protect Indian medicinal plants and Indian bio-heritage from being exploited by the foreign firms?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI E.V.K.S. ELANGOVAN): (a) to (c) Patents are sought and obtained by applicants/inventors, both Indian and foreign, in different countries to safeguard and promote their commercial and other interests. Such patents are granted under the sovereign prerogative of countries according to their respective patent laws and have territorial effect, that is they are effective only in the country of grant. In order to qualify for grant of patent in any country an invention, whether process or product, has to meet the criteria of patentability, namely, novelty inventiveness and industrial applicability.

As patents are essentially private rights they are normally challenged, in accordance with the patent laws of the country concerned, by the person(s) whose interests are affected/jeopardized. As and when information is received about patents being obtained on certain items which are not considered patentable and which affect Indian interests, steps are taken to assess whether the grant of such patent can be challenged under the

patent laws of the country concerned. Earlier a patent granted in the United States of America on the use of turmeric in wound healing was successfully challenged and was also cancelled by the Patent Office of the country concerned. Similarly, a patent on the fungicidal property of neem, granted in Europe, was successfully challenged. The claims of the patent on Basmati Ricelines and grains granted in the United States of America which had the potential of affecting India's commercial interest were also challenged. The said claims were subsequently cancelled by the United States Patent and Trademark Office and the title of the patent was also amended.

Ban on import of Indian drugs by Pakistan

1760. SHRI B.K. HARIPRASAD: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Pakistan has recently banned import of Indian made bulk drugs on the ground that the local drug industry has commenced production of drugs hitherto imported from India;

(b) whether Pakistan permits import of bulk drugs from China, Thailand and Korea even for drugs that are produced locally;

(c) whether India is the only country that has been singled out by Pakistan; and

(d) whether India would take up the matter with its Pakistani counterparts for revoking the ban?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI E.V.K.S. ELANGOVAN): (a) Pakistan has reportedly changed its policy about five years ago for imports of drugs from India to protect local Bulk Drug Industry. Bulk drugs are allowed to be imported from India subject to a customs duty of 25% in order to give protection to the local production in Pakistan.

(b) Yes, Sir. Pakistan permits import of bulk drugs from China, Thailand and Korea even for drugs that are produced locally.

(c) and (d) A Committee of Experts has been set up to discuss trade related issues between the two countries with a view to sorting these out for mutual benefit.